

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10
LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03
NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 HA-05 IO-13 /108 W
-----024286 050748Z /17

R 041641Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 993
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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PARIS FOR LABATT

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O.11652: NA
TAGS: ELAB TS
SUBJ: HUNGER STRIKE BEGUN BY SOME ARRESTED FORMER UGTT
OFFICERS

1. SUMMARY. EMBASSY HAS LEARNED FROM SEVERAL RELIABLE
SOURCES THAT FROM TWENTY TO THIRTY DETAINED EX-UGTT
OFFICIALS HELD 3 DAY HUNGER STRIKE IN TUNIS CIVIL PRISON
APRIL 31-MAY 2. PURPOSE OF STRIKE WAS TO PROTEST
PRISON CONDITIONS, LACK OF MEDICAL ATTENTION, SEPARATION
AND ISOLATION OF PRISONERS, AND FAVORED TREATMENT GIVEN
TO ELEVEN MEMBERS OF PREVIOUS UGTT EXECUTIVE BOARD.
SEVERAL RESIDENT CORRESPONDENTS HAVE ALREADY FILED
STORIES ON STRIKE WITH HOME OFFICES, AND STRIKE WAS MEN-
TIONED (WITHOUT FULL DETAILS) IN SOCIAL DEMOCRAT
WEEKLY ER-RAI MAY 4. OTHER LOCAL PRESS HAS NOT REPORTED
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STORY. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING IS STORY EMBASSY HAS BEEN ABLE TO PIECE
TOGETHER ON HUNGER STRIKE. THIS INFORMATION COMES
FROM VARIOUS SOURCES INCLUDING FAMILY MEMBER OF ARRESTED
SECRETARY GENERAL HABIB ACHOUR. STRIKE WAS BEGUN
APRIL 25-26 BY ISMAIL SAHBANI, FORMER PRESIDENT OF

NATIONAL METAL WORKERS FEDERATION, WHO REPORTEDLY IS BEING HELD IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN TUNIS CIVIL PRISON. HE WAS PROTESTING HIS ISOLATION FROM OTHER PRISONERS AND DENIAL OF VISITING RIGHTS TO FAMILY MEMBERS. HE ALSO PROTESTED POOR SANITARY CONDITIONS AND LACK OF PROPER MEDICAL ATTENTION. SAHBANI'S WIFE HAS REPORTEDLY APPEALED TO NEW PRISON DIRECTOR (AN ARMY OFFICER), ON HUSBAND'S BEHALF AND HAS WRITTEN TO TUNISIAN LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN ASKING FOR INTERCESSION. (NOTE: SAHBANI IS CONSIDERED BY GOT TO BE ONE OF THE MOST RADICAL OF ARRESTED FORMER UGTT OFFICIALS.)

3. SUBSEQUENTLY, SAHBANI WAS JOINED IN STRIKE BY ANOTHER GROUP OF 24 PRISONER ON APRIL 31. STRIKE STARTED APRIL 31 AND CONTINUED THROUGH MAY 2 DURING WHICH PERIOD DETAINEES REFUSED PRISON FOOD AS WELL AS DAILY PACKAGES BROUGHT BY FAMILIES. THIS GROUP IS COMPOSED OF A NUMBER OF FORMER UGTT REGIONAL FEDERATION SECRETARIES-GENERAL AND OTHER MID-LEVEL FORMER UNION OFFICIALS. IN ADDITION TO EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY WITH SAHBANI, THEY PROTESTED AGAINST CROWDED PRISON CONDITIONS (ALL TOGETHER IN ONE LARGE CELL), POOR MEDICAL ATTENTION, AND FORCED SEPARATION FROM OTHER ARRESTED COLLEAGUES. THEY ALSO COMPLAINED OF FAVORED TREATMENT GIVEN TO 11 MEMBERS OF FORMER UGTT EXECUTIVE BOARD. SPECIAL ISSUE WAS THAT ACHOUR AND TWOH CLOSEST COLLABORATORS, ABDELAZIZ BOURAOUI (FORMER UGTT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ASST. SECRETARY GENERAL) AND HASSAN HANNOUDIA (FORMER EDITOR UGTT WEEKLY ECH-CHAAB) WERE RECEIVING PARTICULARLY FAVORED TREATMENT INCLUDING ACCESS TO TELEVISION AND NEWSPAPERS, AS WELL AS SPECIAL VISITING PRIVILEGES. SUPPOSEDLY THE 24 CAN RECEIVE MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES ONLY ON SAME DAY THAT SUCH VISITING RIGHTS ARE ACCORDED TO COMMON CONVICTED CRIMINALS, AND THEY OBJECT TO THEIR WIVES BEING FORCED TO ASSOCIATE WITH SUCH PEOPLE.

4. THEY ALSO PROTESTED CONDITIONS OF DETENTION SUFFERED BY OTHER ARRESTED FORMER UNION OFFICIALS IN SOUSSE, SFAX AND ELSEWHERE. WE UNDERSTAND TOTAL OF 105 UGTT OFFICERS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER DETENTION THROUGHOUT COUNTRY, AND THAT MANY OF THEM HAVE YET TO APPEAR BEFORE INVESTIGATING JUDGE.

5. ALTHOUGH FAMILY MEMBERS TELLS US ACHOUR WENT ON SYMBOLIC HUNGER STRIKE MAY 1, NO CORROBORATING INFORMATION ON THIS IS AVAILABLE. IN FACT, SOME OF OUR SOURCES DENY THAT ACHOUR OR OTHER TEN MEMBERS OF PREVIOUS EXECUTIVE BOARD PARTICIPATED IN STRIKE IN ANY WAY.

6. TUNISIAN LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN, WE UNDERSTAND, HAS BEEN SEEKING TO INTERCEDE ON PRISONERS' BEHALF AND IT IS IN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH FAMILIES OF DETAINEES. STORIES OF STRIKE HAVE NOT APPEARED IN TUNISIAN PAPERS, WITH SINGLE EXCEPTION OF BRIEF AND INCOMPLETE ACCOUNT IN MAY 4 EDITION OF OPPOSITION SOCIAL DEMOCRAT WEEKLY ER-RAI. A NUMBER OF RESIDENT FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS HAVE FILED STORY WITH HOME OFFICES, AND WE KNOW AT LEAST ONE STORY APPEARED IN LE MONDE MAY 3. AS LE MONDE HAS NOT BEEN AVAILABLE IN TUNISIA SINCE GOT BLOCKED PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION OVER A MONTH AGO, FULL STORY HAS NOT GAINED WIDE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OUTSIDE OF A SELECTED NUMBER OF GOT OFFICIALS WHO STILL RECEIVE PAPER. MULCAHY

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